

WASHINGTON - Congressman Hoyer announced today that the Benedict Volunteer Fire Department was awarded a federal Fire Grant in the amount of \$86,589 through the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. As co-chair of the Congressional Fire Caucus, Congressman Hoyer was very active in helping establish and fund the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, which helps local fire departments in Maryland and across the country buy equipment and provide adequate training.

"The Fire Grant Program provides an important service to local fire departments here in Maryland and throughout the country," said Congressman Hoyer. "Our volunteer and career firefighters sacrifice a great deal to protect our communities and it is our duty to provide them with the equipment and training that they need to keep their departments running safely and efficiently."

"It is critical that our firefighters and first responders have the resources they need to better protect themselves and the communities they serve. I am thrilled that the Benedict Volunteer Fire Department was the recipient of a grant that will help them improve the safety of their firefighters at the scene of an emergency," Hoyer concluded.

The Benedict VFD was awarded a federal Fire Grant in the amount of \$86,589 under the program area of Fire Operations and Firefighter Safety. The grant will be used to purchase 10 new sets of Self Contained Breathing Apparatus' (SCBA), a thermal imaging device, and 50 SCBA masks allowing 100% of their firefighters to be properly outfitted.

Benedict VFD Past Chief Sean Kerrigan said, "if it wasn't for this fire grant, we would not be able to purchase this equipment without going deeply into debt. Our budget is simply not big enough for big purchases. This grant will help our firefighters feel safer, be better equipped and will keep our equipment up to date."

Congressman Hoyer helped start the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program because fire departments often have difficulty purchasing proper equipment. A ladder truck for a local fire department can run upwards of \$750,000 and outfitting one firefighter with turnout gear and breathing apparatus can approach \$4,500. In addition, departments must fund training programs for paid and/or volunteer firefighters.

The program funding can be used for the following: turnout gear; breathing apparatus; communications equipment; wellness and fitness programs; computer and technology improvements for record keeping and training purposes; training in fire-fighting, emergency response and arson prevention; improving the enforcement of fire codes; and modifying fire stations and fire training facilities to protect the health and safety of the firefighter personnel.

President Bush's budget blueprint for fiscal year 2002 eliminated funding for the Firefighter program, contending that the fire grant program "does not represent an appropriate responsibility of the federal government." Congressman Hoyer and other members of Congress successfully restored funding to the program, most recently securing \$750 million in fiscal year 2004, \$250 million more than the President's request for 2004. For fiscal year 2005, the Bush Administration proposes reducing the \$750 million grant program by one-third, for a cut of \$250 million dollars which Congressman Hoyer is fighting to restore.

This year, Congressman Hoyer was also successful in securing \$50 million in funding for the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Firefighters (SAFER) Program in the Homeland Security funding bill which passed in the House of Representatives in June. Funding for this historic new federal grant program will help career and volunteer fire departments hire new firefighters, recruit and retain volunteer fire fighters, and provide relief to the thousands of local fire stations across the country that are currently operating short of staff.

Since 2001, Maryland has received over \$16 million in grant funding from the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. Fire departments that have received grants in Maryland's Fifth District include La Plata, Hughesville, Mechanicsville, Solomons, Laurel, Prince George's County, Seventh District, Leonardtown, College Park, Cobb Island, Second District, Brandywine, and Greenbelt.

A list of all current recipients to date is posted on the USFA web site at [www.usfa.fema.gov/grants](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/grants). Future grant recipients will be listed as awards are made.

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